

[Living By Faith]

No. 2

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LIFE HISTORY

TITLE: LIVING BY FAITH

Date of First Writing January 26, 1939

Name of Person Interviewed W. A.[,?] and Susie Crede

Fictitious Names W. A.[,?] and Susie Holmes

Street Address 240 Augusta Street

Place West Columbia, South Carolina

Occupation Mill Worker

Name of Writer Helen Shuler

Name of Reviser State Office

A radio was playing full tilt and through the closed door came the strains of the popular song, "The Umbrella Man." To the noise of the radio was the added confusion of crying, petulant children.

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When I had rapped several times, the crying within the room subsided and a young girl, followed by two small children with dirty tear-stained faces and dripping noses, opened the door.

“Does Mr. Holmes live here? Is he at home this morning, and may I talk with him a little while?”

“Let me turn off this radio so you can hear. I'll call my father; he's in the next bedroom. He is at home today because he isn't so well. No, ma'am, C10 - 1/31/41 - S.C.

2

he isn't sick enough to be in bed. It's just his asthma.”

In a pleasant hospitable manner I was invited to come into the room and to have a seat near the coal fire. A glance around showed that the room was used as a living room and bedroom. There in a corner was a dark wooden bed, neatly made with a light-colored spread. A small table near the door held a simple vase; the radio and several chairs comprised the rest of the room's furniture.

While waiting for Mr. Holmes to make his appearance, this rapid speaking young woman and the two children began in their friendly way to entertain me. The children brought out their toys they had gotten from Santa Claus, and the young mother began to tell of her morning's work.

“I've been back in the cook room scrubbing, and I had the radio turned loud so I could work and listen. I love the music and the songs. I was late getting at my scrubbing this morning. But I declare to goodness, the kids have been so mean today that I couldn't do nothing but tend to them. We usually scrub out the whole house every weeks but Marie, she's the colored girl who helps us, is sick, and the weather was so bad all week I didn't get to do it.

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"Yes, ma'am, these are my children. I've been married four years. I got married when I was just fifteen. One day I told Ma I was going over to Katie's house to spend the day, and that night, when she came for me to go to prayer meeting, Jim said, 'Well, Mrs. Holmes, I reckon Minnie can't go tonight. She belongs to me now.' Ma almost had a fit, she was so mad, and started to make me go home with her."

Mr. Holmes, a small stoop-shouldered man, had quietly entered the room and taken a seat near the fire. The reason for his choice of seats was soon evidenced by his continual spitting into the fire. He was neatly and cleanly dressed in dark trousers, with a vest to match, and a white shirt. His thick and glossy brown hair showed recent brushing. The expression in his mild, dark-brown eyes and soft voice indicated that he had become resigned to circumstances rather than continue the struggle caused by opposing religious views. ?

When I made known to him the purpose of my visit, he disclaimed having an interesting or eventful life but willingly told in a quiet and unassuming way of his struggle to provide a few comforts for his family. [unnecessary?]

"I'm not much good at talking, but I'll be glad to tell you what I know. If Susie, that's my wife, was here she'd talk to you. She talks most all the time. I think she'll be here before long, as she just went out to see the doctor. When she's not at home praying, she's gone to visit the sick or needy. Just let her hear of any one who's sick, and she stops whatever work she's at and goes. Even if the dinner is cooking, she just forgets all about it and leaves it on the stove. And when she gets back, if the food is burned, it's all right; and, if the fire is out, it's all right, too. I hope she comes home before you leave. She'll want to see you. She likes to talk to strangers about her sickness and her church.

"There's not very much I can tell about my father, because, when I was six years old, my mother left him and brought us children down here to Columbia. But I can remember he

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used to tell us how he ran away from his home in Germany and worked in the galley on the ship to pay his way, because he didn't have any money.”

Galley? What is the galley of a ship and what kind of work did he do there? [unnecessary?]

“The sailors call the kitchen the galley, and my father helped to bake 4 the bread. In those days it took several weeks for the ship to come across the ocean, and he learned enough about baking bread that, when he landed in Charleston, he got a job in a bakery. Then the war (War Between the States) began and he didn't want to join the army; so whenever he heard the officers were coming, he hid in an empty flour barrel behind the shop.

“But he soon left Charleston and moved to Newberry to open a small bakery of his own. He had a good education and could speak three or four languages. He could talk Jew better than a Jew himself. I often think that if I had stayed with him I would have gone to school.

“No, ma'am, I can't read or write, but I know my name when I see it. There were three of us children. I was the middle one. When I was six years old, my mother left my father. I never knew what made her decide to leave. She came down here and opened a small candy store on Assembly Street. We had an awful hard time then. But about that time the Duck Mill started, and I got a job there. I ran the first cotton through the mill. My first wages was twenty-five cents a day, and we worked twelve hours a day. Then they promoted me to draw boy and paid me forty cents a day. If I do brag on myself a little, I was steady on my job, worked hard and tried to do it right. The superintendent seemed to appreciate this and advanced me rapidly, and soon I was a slubber, making one dollar a day. By the time I was fifteen years old, I had a section and was drawing one dollar and fifty cents a day.

“Susie and I got married in 1913, and by that time I was getting twenty-five dollars a week. When the war came on, I made as much as fifty dollars a week. But now I am getting only twenty dollars and twenty cents a week and glad for that. During good times we managed to save a little, and we bought us a little home out in Shandon for \$2,500. We paid \$500

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cash. That was all 5 we had saved. Then we put a mortgage on for the rest. We were paying the payments of twenty dollars regularly every month until Susie took sick and the mill shut down to part time.

“Then we just couldn't make the payments; so we sold the place for thirteen hundred dollars and moved back here to the village. We got five hundred dollars for our portion, but it didn't stay with us long. There was too many hospital and doctor bills. And Susie was helpless so long. She couldn't walk a step, as her feet were all drawn over on their sides. We had to keep a colored woman here with her all the time, and that cost me seven dollars and fifty cents a week.

“We had a pretty hard time to get along, but I managed to keep my job. And we had enough that neither my wife nor the two girls had to work in the mill. My boy, he's twenty-six, is working in the mill now and pays us five dollars a week board. He runs a section and gets twenty dollars a week. The oldest girl is married and is keeping house on another street. Minnie, the baby girl, is married too, and she and her husband and two little children live here; but they take care of their own expenses. The mill keeps up the houses and our living expenses are not very much. The rent is only one dollar and five cents a week, and our lights usually run one dollar a month. Me and Susie could get along pretty well on my twenty dollars and twenty cents a week, but she is sick so much and always having to run to the doctor. Then she gives away so much. Lots of times she'll go to the grocery store and get two or three dollars worth of stuff and take it to some one. I've bought enough furniture to fill several houses bigger than this one. But if any one comes along wanting something, Susie just sells off a piece. Of if they need the furniture, she just gives it to them. We haven't much left now, just enough 6 to get by with.”

“Do you have a garden or keep a cow, Mr. Holmes?” Try to avoid this

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"No, we have to buy all our vegetables and milk. But it's convenient to do that, because wagons and trucks come by every day with all kinds of stuff. The yards with these houses are too small for a garden or for a cow. ?

"I don't have time for much recreation, and I don't care to do much more than just to stay home and rest. I never have had a car. Somehow, I never fancied one. I haven't been to a picture show in thirty years. Hardly ever go to church. Once in a while I go to the Riverside Baptist, but I don't belong to any church. On Sundays I like to sit around the house and rest. When I was younger, I used to enjoy hunting and fishing. But now my asthma makes my breath too short. See, I have only three fingers on my right hand. One time, when I was just a boy, I was fooling with a gun and it went off and shot the flesh off my thumb and first finger. Then the doctor just cut off the bones down to my hand. I don't smoke or chew, as the tobacco gets in my teeth and worries me. But I dip snuff. Been using it about twenty-five years. Susie gives me down the country and calls it a sin and filthy, but I can't stop now."

Mrs. Holmes had not yet returned, and the sun was shining so warm that Minnie, the two children, and I moved out on to the porch to enjoy it.

"Minnie, tell me something about your husband. What kind of work does he do for a living?"

"Jim works with a construction company; drives a truck. He gets twenty-five dollars a week. He sure is a good husband. We've been married four years and he never has hit me. Jim says that before he'd hit me he'd just leave home. He doesn't believe in hitting a woman. We got along real well, but it sure takes a lot of money to live. The children are always needing so 7 many things."

"Are they well? They look as though they must be."

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"Yes, ma'am, they are healthy. Right now both of them have bad colds. But Joanna was sick the whole of her first year and was in the hospital nearly all the time. You see, before she was born I had pus on the kidney, and at the hospital they gave me a spinal injection so they could drain off the pus. It nearly killed me. Then when she was born, she had this kidney trouble from me."

"Do you think it will be much longer until your mother comes?"

"She should have been back long ago. Probably she had to wait to get in to see the doctor. Sometimes there is a crowd ahead of her. But you'll know when she's anywhere near. You'll hear her talking to every one she sees in the neighborhood."

The children had gone out into the yard and were playing and running around the house. Now the larger one, the little girl, came to tell us that "Granny" was coming down the street.

A tiny little woman weighing no more than seventy-five pounds, came quickly around the corner of the house. Her big blue eyes, set far back in her head, flashed with interest as she took in the group at a glance. Her swarthy skin was stretched tight across her jaw bones and looked thick and leathery. Her nervous hands, never still for a moment, were so thin and long as to resemble a bird's claws. She wore a long black coat over a neat dark print dress, and instead of a hat she wore a brown hair net to keep her thin locks in place.

"Good morning, Mrs. Holmes. How are you feeling today? It's such a beautiful day, every one should be feeling well."

8

"Well now, I'm not feeling so good. I've been out to see the doctor this morning."

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"Mrs. Holmes, I've been told that you have had a nest interesting life, that you are such a good woman and do so many things to help the needy. I want you to tell me something about yourself."

Then speaking very rapidly and in a clear thin voice she replied, "Now, for the lands' sakes, whoever told you that surely stretched themselves. But do come on in the house. I'm tired and I want to rest. I've been over in town all morning waiting on that doctor. There was such a crowd ahead of me."

She led the way through the front room into her bedroom. Pushed as closely up into the corner as possible was a cheap iron bed. Over its thin lumpy mattress was spread a soiled gray cotton blanket. There were no pillows. A low tool box was placed against the wall between the door to the adjoining room and the corner fireplace. In the back corner of the room was a battered trunk. The room was lighted by two windows, at which hung light-colored paper shades. One of these was in a fairly good condition, but the other had worn off halfway from the top, and had been pieced out with newspaper. Across one corner of the room had been stretched a cord clothesline, on which was hanging several of the baby's diapers. The unpainted pine floor was sandy and dingy. Ashes from the coal fire had fallen through the grate and covered the hearth.

When Mrs. Holmes seated herself in her rocking chair, the smaller of the two children crawled into her lap and snuggled against her. "Minnie," she said, "do give me something to wipe this child's nose with."

"Well, Ma, I just don't know where I'll find anything." And after vainly searching for the necessary article she concluded with, "Oh, just use his apron. I'll have to wash today, anyway. Goodness, they take so many clothes. I have to wash for them every day."

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"I do enjoy doing what little I can for the sick," Mrs. Holmes began, "and sharing the little I have with those who are needy. You know our Master says, 'In as much as you have done it unto the least of these, you have done it unto me.' I go whenever I am able to go. But I am sick so much of the time. The doctors told me a long time ago there wasn't anything they could do for me. They could just patch me up. At that time I belonged to the Riverside Baptist Church, but I wasn't a Christian. I hadn't been saved.

"One night I was awful sick. I was in a dreadful fix. Couldn't hardly walk. Just hobble along with some one holding onto me. My feet were turned over on their sides. The doctor came that night and told me I'd die before morning. There wasn't another thing he could do. Then the preacher, Dr. Derrick, came to pray for me so I could go to heaven. After they left me, I thought about some passages I had read in my Bible: 'Is any sick among you? Let him call the elders of the church; and let them pray for him.' And another, 'And the prayer of faith shall save the sick and the Lord shall raise him up.' Then I remembered about the meeting going on over at the Free Will Holiness Church. I called my husband and told him I was going there to get them to pray for me."

"You can go if you want to," he told me, "but I am not going to help you get there. I don't believe in such foolishness."

"Then I called the old Negro woman I had to take care of me. She put a few clothes on me and picked me up in her arms and carried me over to the church. When I got there, I asked the preacher to pray for me. During the meeting I realized what a sinner I had been, and I know that if I did die that night I'd go to hell. I knew then that I'd never been a Christian and that my faith had been weak. When we got through praying and I got up off my knees, my feet had been straightened. I could walk the same as anybody. On that Monday night the Lord 10 had healed me, and that's the night I was saved. I had been cured by prayer. Now all the relief I get, I get from the Lord. I live by faith.

"When I got back home that night, the old bogey man, that's what I call him, tempted me. I found my baby awful sick. I told her pa not to send for a doctor, and I just got down on my knees and prayed. I asked the Lord to cure her. By morning she was as well as ever. The lord had answered my prayer and cured her.

"Sometime later my married daughter was sick, and the doctor said she had double pneumonia. He was giving her all kinds of medicine, but she wasn't getting any better. One night I went over there, and the doctor had just told the family that Annie couldn't live out the night. They were going on something terrible. I quieted them the best I could. Then I went in the closet and got down on my knees, like the Master said: and I prayed and prayed. When I came out of the closet, my daughter was much easier and had fallen asleep. The next morning when the doctor came and found her so much better, he was surprised and wanted to know what I had done. I told him the Lord had cured her. I had just prayed and asked his help."

"Is your daughter, Minnie, a Christian, and does she have as much faith as you?" I asked.

"Good gracious me, that child has more faith than I do. I wish mine was as strong as hers. Minnie used to be a Christian before she started going to picture shows. But she ain't no Christian now. You remember what the Master told the rich young ruler, 'One thing thou lackest.' Minnie will go to moving picture shows, and I think any one that goes to picture shows can't be a Christian."

"Why, Mrs. Holmes, don't you enjoy a good picture show?"

"Deliver me from them. They are not of God, and I won't tolerate anything that is not of God.

11

Minnie, who was sitting on the tool box, quietly listening, now spoke up to take care of her side of the question, "I really enjoy a good picture, and I go whenever I can. But I hafter

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sneak away from Ma. I tell her I am going up town to buy a pattern or something, but, instead, I go to the show. After I've been in there awhile, I'll see Ma coming down the aisle looking for me. Then I'll duck my head down to hide. She usually finds me and pulls me out."

"Yes, ma'am, Mrs. Holmes added, "that's the only time I ever go in the picture place."

Apparently enjoying the recounting of her past and present ailments, Mrs. Holmes continued, "The doctors just patched me up. I was in a dreadful fix. Dr. Babcock treated me for a long time. He said I had pellagra inside and outside. It took everything we could rake and scrape to pay the bills. He made me drink lots of milk and eat vegetables. But the doctors can't cure all the time. The Lord has to take a hand in it, and He'll do it when we ask him, but we must have faith."

"Don't yod think doctors are good and help us, Mrs. Holmes?"

"Sure, doctors are good. The Lord put them here. If they weren't good, He wouldn't have put them here. unnecessary

"About three years ago I was real sick again. My faith must not have been as strong as it had been, because I let them persuade me to go to the hospital. The doctors said I had ulcer of the stomach or maybe cancer. I stayed there three weeks. When I was able to come back home, they told me I had to eat something or drink milk every two hours. But I couldn't do that. I got so tired of the milk, and, anyway, I'm not always where I can eat that often. My stomach worries me something terrible. There's such a hollow feeling and misery 12 right here."

To illustrate she placed her hand on her stomach to show the location of the "hollow feeling and the misery."

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"Mrs. Holmes, I find that so many of the women here in the village use snuff instead of the more modern cigarette, do you use it?"

Emphasizing her denial by pounding her hands on the arms of her chair, she said, "No, indeed, I do not use that stuff. Before I was saved and became a Christian I used it. But the Lord has cleaned me from that filthiness of the flesh and all other filthiness."

"Your husband tells me that he enjoys snuff and has been using it for twenty-five years."

"Yes, he does. That is a sin he must answer for when he goes to meet his God. He hasn't yet been saved and is not a Christian. I can't get him to go to church nor read his Bible. I don't read anything but my Bible. There's nothing good but the Bible.

"You've been asking me all the questions, now I want to ask you one. Tell me what church you belong to?"

"I'm a member of St. Pauls' Lutheran Church, Mrs. Holmes. That's the one on the corner of Bull and Blanding Streets."

You are? Yes, I know where it is. I'm so glad, for I just love the Lutherans. They are so good. I know Mr. Smith from St. Pauls'. He comes down here to see me real often, and he prays with me. I tell you he is a good man and I sure love him.

"If it hadn't been for my faith in the Lord I would not be living today. 'The just shall live by his faith.'"

HS

MPJ.